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### The End of the World as we Know it: Destructive Dystopia

I want you to close your eyes, and imagine. Imagine a world infested with a virus so contagious that hospitals are overflowing with sick. People are panicking. The media incites this panic, spreading false news and filling the hearts of every person with fear. They flock to stores in droves, stuffing carts with canned food, bottled water, and toilet paper. Flights out of the country are suspended, stores are closed, and people are locked in their homes. Now, you may be thinking, “right, we all know about the Coronavirus, Marisa.” However, I was actually not describing current events. That was the plot to *Station Eleven*, a dystopian novel written by Emily Mandel years ago. When I first read this story, I was shocked. This was a warning to me, of how similar dystopian novels are to reality. Today I will be examining key themes within dystopian literature, specifically the removal of individualism, redefinition of war, and influence of technology, which all exist under power-hungry governments. Additionally, I will explain the relevance of this to us, and why it demands our attention. Finally, I will detail how we as Christians can respond. The themes and concepts displayed in dystopian literature, namely totalitarian governments monitoring citizens, removing individualism, and destroying the value of life, eerily mirror present day realities (RD: parallelism). While still labeled as fiction, these warnings demand attention for they possess the power to destroy societies, and the people in them.

*Due to the recent surge in popularity of dystopian literature, the true meaning of the word “dystopian” drowns underneath the crashing waves of ambiguity and overuse. In order to narrow this topic, let me first pinpoint the specific type of dystopia to which I am referring.*

*Merriam Webster defines dystopian as “an imagined world or society in which people lead dehumanized, fearful lives” (“Dystopian”), fearful of the government’s growing power, fearful of the regression of the value of life, or even fearful of technology’s increasing influence (RD: Anaphora).*

*So, if we understand a utopian society as perfect, then a dystopian society is imperfect. (CT -Definition). These fictional dystopias all adhere to similar, reoccurring features, namely overpopulation, a poor standard of living for the middle and lower classes, advanced technology controlled by those in power, and a previous disaster that led to dramatic societal changes.*

*The authors of these dystopian novels very simply extrapolate current trends into the future. They look at ongoing events and determine how they will eventually progress (RD - Amplification).*

*Along with this, the protagonist typically questions this society, for they have an intuitive feeling that something is wrong. Like Katniss Everdeen in “The Hunger Games,” Thomas in “The Maze Runner,” or Tris Prior in “Divergent” (RD - Allusion),*

*dystopian protagonists challenge their oppressive governments, fighting against the dystopian society that ensnares them. Like these protagonists, I am pleading for you to take an in-depth look at present-day society. A society (RD: Anadiplosis) that actively strives after the unattainable: perfection.*

*These themes demand our attention. For example, Cal Thomas, one of America’s most syndicated columnists whom I had the honor of interviewing, recently wrote a book titled “America’s Expiration Date” which outlines a 250 year pattern leading to the decline of great nations. After this intensive and in-depth study of history he warns, “We are on the same path as*

*these other empires and superpowers and all I'm saying in the book is that we better pay attention because... as Ronald Reagan used to say, we're only one generation away from losing them all," from losing all our freedoms. He continues, "There is no guarantee that the United States will be able to avoid that, any more than we've been able to avoid the Coronavirus. I mean...humans are humans, and human nature is human nature" (Thomas Interview). He recognizes that human nature is imperfect, thus this utopia America so ardently strives for is unachievable. If we are following the same path that has led to the downfall of previous superpowers and nations, continuously straying further and further from God's truths, won't history repeat as it has in the past? (RD- Rhetorical Question). We all must recognize the gravity of the situation. Although present day America is not restrained by an oppressive regime, these themes have relevance in today's society, and they call for every person to perceive them and act accordingly.*

*Some unconvinced individuals believe that to define present day society as dystopian, a preposterous proposition by itself, ignorantly overuses a dying metaphor that has no relevance within reality (RD: Procatalepsis). This belief holds some truth, for America has not yet entirely slipped into the open claws of dystopia ever presently attempting to ensnare. However, to illogically ignore the evident traces of dystopian themes in society further condemns us to ignorance, actually inhibiting our awareness and knowledge. These skeptics proclaim, "a speaker who uses that kind of phraseology has gone some distance toward turning himself into a machine...he may be almost unconscious of what he is saying, as one is when one utters the responses in church" (Garrison 69-70). They believe that those who dare to use the word dystopian when describing reality walk around as a mindless drone, an uneducated being*

unable to form thoughts of their own. I argue the opposite. To believe that we all must turn a blind eye toward society, not acknowledging the ever present themes of dystopia, is absurd. They believe that to relate current events to dystopian literature is the same as mindlessly repeating religious responses. I argue the opposite. To believe that blind acceptance of the state of society is more reasonable than, key word, *reasoning* through everyday occurrences is nonsensical. The act of dissecting a theme and noticing its prevalence in society creates a world aware of the nature of society. On the other hand, blind acceptance creates a people who **“are slow-moving... [who] will ultimately remember only the simplest idea repeated a thousand times over”** (Mckay 24), leaving a world **“that will accept any claim... because they have been lead to believe”** that **“is the only option”** (Mckay 24) (CT - Antecedent and Consequence).

Maybe the word dystopian is overused, however, the true underlying message does not lie within the word's overuse, it lies within the relevance of dystopia's danger in today's society. We must not turn a blind eye to this. Even the Bible commands us to walk with our eyes wide open, not blindly accepting the ways of the world. In Matthew chapter 24 verses 42-43, God calls us to **“keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come”** (*New International Version, Matt. 24.42-43*). Right from the beginning, God commands us to keep watch, to be aware, to not sit idly, letting the world pass by. He continues, **“but understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into”** (Matt. 24.42-43), instructing every person to be prepared for the final days. We must be aware of the state of society. The conniving criminal does not steal from the informed, but plunders the houses of those who sit back and think nothing can be done, those who let society continue without them.

Thus, the observation of dystopian themes in present day society does not create an uninformed race mindlessly repeating scriptural references they know nothing about, but a nation aware of their surroundings, expectant of the thief who comes in the night.

The first of these dystopian themes that I will highlight, society's removal of the worth of life, commands our attention, for the young and unborn face the threat of death daily. Abortion, one of the leading causes of death worldwide, promises assistance to struggling mothers who feel unable to support a child. This promise, merely a mask, conceals their true goal: the malicious elimination of individuality and worth. This news does not shock anyone. Everyone knows that abortions occur daily, extinguishing any possibility of a bright future for thousands of humans. Although, many are unaware of the malevolent ideas and intentions that propelled the legalization of abortion. Planned Parenthood founder and birth control activist Margaret Sanger, in one of her many works, states, **“it is high time that we begin, with all the energy and efficiency at our command, to cultivate our human garden, to apply the lessons we have learned in...agriculture to our human livestock”** (Sanger). She relates human life to plants and animals, completely devaluing human worth. In addition to this, she calls every person to weed out those who are different, those who do not live up to her quantitative measurements, just like a farmer would kill animals who do not live up to his specifications. Abortion does not exist to assist the population, but to alienate individuals, suffocating differences and likening human life to that of a marigold (CT: Analogy). Even before abortion was legalized in America, dystopian literature forewarned the coming destruction of individuality that would occur. *The Chrysalids*, a science fiction novel written by John Wyndham, presents a disturbingly familiar message: **“Abnormal humans (who are not really human) are... condemned to**

**destruction” (Wyndham).** This book, written in 1955, tells a story of a young boy who does not fit in with society’s definition of man, for to be a human one must have two joints on every leg, and with every leg **“one foot, and each foot five toes, and each toe shall end with a flat nail,”** **concluding that “any creature that shall seem to be human, but is not formed thus is not human” (Wyndham 13).** The belief that humanity can be perfected through weeding out “imperfections” eerily reflects the underlying idea abortionists hold: **certain people do not deserve life because they do not live up to a specific standard. Certain people do not deserve to live (RD: Conduplicatio).** The loss of individuality, a common theme in dystopian literature, **threatens the uniqueness that God places in every person.** This theme, one of the founding beliefs of Planned Parenthood, consumes present day society, threatening to diminish the worth of all humans alike.

Not only does society’s removal of the worth of life threaten the lives of the young, it also endangers the old, a theme that will inevitably cause society to crumble into an irreversible dystopia. This theme, consistently utilized in dystopian works of literature, paints an eery picture of the not-so-distant future. In *Unwind*, a dystopian novel by Neal Shusterman, **“Juvey-cops” pull up to houses in trucks and take children in order to “unwind” them (Shusterman 15).** In this society, life has become so unimportant that parents are allowed to “unwind,” or abort, children up to the age of eighteen. Vans roam the streets, stealing the lives of children and young adults. This image is horrific; all people should have the right to live, no matter how young or old. However, “right to life” is a term that few people believe, and even fewer fight for (Pathos). Mobile units on the go and ready to take the lives of others is nauseating, yet this already exists today, and will continue to increase in popularity. **In 2012 a system of “euthanasia vans” was**

launched to travel around the Netherlands and euthanize patients in their homes. As if in response to this, British Columnist Katie Hopkins stated in 2015, “We just have far too many old people...it’s ridiculous to be living in a Country where we can put dogs to sleep but not people.” She then suggested, as a solution for the overpopulation of the elderly, “Euthanasia vans that go to homes like ice cream trucks,” claiming “It would be perfectly charming” (Sieczkowski 4). Netherlands, being the first country to legalize assisted suicide (Euthanasia Deaths Becoming 2), made it simple for the elderly to die when they wished. But now, even those whose doctors have refused an assisted suicide can simply call a van to do the deed. Not only this, people are beginning to stand up in support of this (Pathos). The devaluation of human life not only appears in fictional literature, but exists as one of the biggest threats to humanity. If quantitative measurements are the only thing assuring human life, then how does one know who is safe and who is not? (RD: Rhetorical Question). What happens if, someday, we no longer have a choice?

Furthermore, dystopian literature completely redefines war, the totalitarian governments approaching it with utter indifference, an increasing theme in present day foreign affairs. The entirely pointless wars in dystopia foreshadow a world filled with unnecessary deaths. Within George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston, a middle-aged protagonist who rebels against the confines of his totalitarian government, describes that war has been boiled down to, “a warfare of limited aims between combatants who are unable to destroy one another, [and] have no material cause for fighting.” These wars involve “very small numbers of people, mostly highly trained specialists, and cause...comparatively few casualties. The fighting, when there is any, takes place on the vague frontiers whose whereabouts the average man

**can only guess at,” and, in the cities and civilizations, war “means no more than ... the occasional crash of a rocket bomb which may cause a few scores of deaths” (Orwell 190).**

Within dystopian societies, war amounts to nothing. It is commonplace. This theme also exists outside of literature for, alarmingly, this passage reflects the type of wars occurring today.

Thomas Ricks, a former Wall Street and Washington Post journalist, who specializes in the U.S. military (Ethos), dissects this very passage, noting **“in an era when U.S. wars are waged with drones firing precision-guided missiles, and with small numbers of special operations forces on the ground in remote parts of the Middle East,”** and on top of this, **“with infrequent attacks in cities such as London, Paris, Madrid...this passage from the novel is eerily prescient” (Ricks 81) (Logos).** War today is the simple flexing of muscles, the one-upping of one other that pauses just before total destruction, accomplishing nothing. Civilians unnecessarily die, their life worth less than worthless war. These two passages, side by side, uncannily mirror one another. War, no longer a last resort, ravages the environment and removes individual worth.

Moreover, one of the most universally utilized themes in dystopian literature, the looming danger of technology, not only threatens fictional societies, but jeopardizes the planet earth by monitoring everything and everyone. When most people think of a dystopian future, they automatically jump to technological control. The entirety of this theme can be broken down into three corresponding parts, which can be seen here (\*motions toward powerpoint). For the sake of time, I will only be covering two of these themes today. First, I will discuss its role in the observation of humanity. **Thomas Ricks explains, “the rise of the intelligence state” after 9/11 has introduced “an intrusive, overweening state” in which “governments...quietly compile**



**dossiers on the behavior of millions of individuals” (Ricks 81).** As an expert in the U.S. military, Thomas Ricks has seen first hand how the American government uses this advanced technology. For instance, **the U.S. government targeted and eliminated people who had previously displayed “a threatening pattern of behavior associated with terrorists,” a series of strikes in the early 2000s known as “signature strikes” (Ricks 81).** If the government has been able to, through technology, detect patterns associated with terrorists, what kinds of patterns are they discovering about the average American living their day-to-day lives? This theme displayed in literature mirrors present day reality all too closely. M.T. Anderson, in his novel *Feed*, describes a world much like our own, completely reliant on technology. Titus, a 12-year within this dystopian society, describes that technology **“knows everything you want and hope for, sometimes before you even know what those things are. Everything we think and feel is taken in by the corporations” (48).** The message paints a haunting picture of a world in which artificial intelligence has developed patterns so intricate it understands what Titus wants, even before he himself recognizes it. A world that sounds faintly familiar (RD: Conduplicatio). This dystopian theme has clearly jumped off the pages of fiction, integrating itself into reality. With this type of control and information, what could governments accomplish? For those who are unconvinced, how many of you have spoken or even thought about a product, which has later shown up as an ad on a website or social media (RD: Apostrophe)?

Even more sinister, society’s ever increasing dependency on technology promises a future of ignorant people, unable to form thoughts and ideas of their own. Within this dystopian theme, people exist as slaves to technology, their lives meaningless without it. Once more, Titus describes life before society devolved. Life before people became as reliant on technology as a

fish with water (RD: Simile). A life (RD: Anaphora) in which people **“had to use their hands and their eyes. Computers were all outside the body. They carried them around outside of them in their hands, like if you carried your lungs in a briefcase and opened it to**

**breathe” (Anderson 47). People became so glued to their technology that it soon became just as important as eating, breathing, living (RD: Asyndeton). This theme has invaded society.**

Technology has become so ingrained in culture that it has not only infiltrated our minds, but also our homes. **For example, “how much of our privacy do we give up in order to turn on the lights by asking an assistant? Should our data be ours, or is it part of the unsigned contract we make with tech companies to use their free services?” (Is a Tech Dystopia 7).** We as a society have become so reliant on automation that we stopped using our hands to turn on the lights, simply asking an automated robot instead. Thus, **“critical questions about our future, and our capacity to direct it (without covert manipulation) are being squandered. Why think when an...app can do it for you? Why pay for independent well-sourced and verified or verifiable journalism when an approximation is made available” (O’Brien 121)** online, an approximation that tells everyone what to believe without doing the research? This deafening march of technology, without a foreseeable end, has become the backbone of society. It turns humanity into drones, unable to think or act for themselves. It shapes ideas and controls thoughts. A society without automation is unimaginable, thus the only way to continue is forward. Dystopian literature maps a clear path toward complete and total dependency upon technology, a path that society currently traverses, a path that only ends in the destruction of thought.

While still labeled as fiction, the themes and concepts displayed in dystopian literature,

namely totalitarian governments monitoring citizens, removing individualism, and destroying the value of life, mysteriously mimic present day realities (parallelism). These warnings demand attention for they possess the power to destroy societies, and the people in them. This plethora of heavy news makes it easy to slip into hopelessness, thinking nothing can be done; but there is good news. As followers of Christ, we hold the solution in our hands. We all must **“become Jesus to a culture that has lost its way—to live up to the high moral and ethical standard of the Bible to demonstrate God’s love for the world by reflecting that love” (Thomas 164).** Now, this definitely won’t be easy, but as long as we continue setting standards of decency, persevering through hardships all the while learning from our failures, and tempering **“skepticism with hope, never allowing it to fall into cynicism” (Thomas 165), we can rise to the challenge. Along with this, we must never forget the power of prayer, for prayer changes the hearts of people “in ways no politician could” (Thomas 167). After all, “change works from the inside out” (Thomas 167).** While time would not allow me to discuss every theme in the dystopian genre, I have presented you with some of the most daunting to our society, but beware: more exist, so you must keep your eyes open. However, even when the entire world reflects the most disastrous dystopia. Even when the media is filled with panic about a perilous pandemic. Even when culture seems to be crumbling. Never lose hope in our Creator. Never lose hope.

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